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To the Members of the Yorkville Branch of the British American League.

MY FELLOW LEAGUERS,—

It is with much concern that I have read in the *Patriot*, a resolution passed by you in reference to my views on the question of elective institutions. Had those views been met by argument, or any position I assumed been controverted by you in the slightest degree, some benefit might have arisen from its publication; but passing over the direct personal allusion to myself, which, to say the least, conveys a sort of censure upon the presiding officer of the central committee of the League, a course not likely to strengthen their hands, I submit, whether any advantage to be derived, from parading before the public merely conflicting opinions of members of an association, whose utility depends upon its unanimity, and whose measures, to carry weight with them, must be based upon some show of reason and sound sense, is not more than doubtful. Believe me, my present views have not been adopted without deep reflection, and the conviction has been forced upon me, in spite of long cherished feelings, that Canada does not possess the peculiar materials upon which depends the excellence of British institutions, and that there is little analogy between the British constitution and the system of government that now obtains in Canada. Take for instance the two higher branches of the legislature, where is their parallelism with the throne and peers? Take the government of Canada as now constituted, what is it? A rampant democracy of the worst description; a democracy without any counteracting influence to hold it in check or prevent the party in power from wreaking their vengeance upon their opponents. Would its character be changed by the advent of the Conservatives to power? Do you desire to see the system perpetuated? Instead of prerogatives that cannot be exercised, I propose substituting defined powers, that can be called into action when the necessity for their use arises. To illustrate my meaning, take the Indemnity Act; it passed both branches of the legislature. A hundred thousand freemen petition that the royal assent may be withheld from that obnoxious measure; their earnest and respectful request is treated with contempt. The atrocious bill becomes law, in downright outrage to the feelings of at least a large minority of the people of the province. Now, under the other system, suppose the act passed in the same manner, the elected governor, whose interests are identified with our own, and who would understand the feeling of the country, interposes his veto; the bill goes back to the other branches, and, unless re-passed by a majority of two-thirds of both houses, remains a dead letter. He fears not to exercise the power entrusted to him for the public good; neither his salary nor his tenure of office is jeopardized thereby; while the governor appointed by the crown dares not to carry out the wishes of the petitioners, lest, upon a fresh election, their views, unsustained by perhaps a bare majority, should hurl him from his place and deprive him of his income. In the one case, due provision is made for insuring respect for the opinions and feelings of the minority; in the other they are recklessly sacrificed to individual selfishness, as base as it is paltry. The first places a man in a position to discharge an onerous duty with impartiality, the other offers a bonus to injustice.

With regard to the royal authority, I know of no authority inherent in a British monarch, other than that exercised by the ministers of the crown; that is the authority of the House of Commons, the authority of the British people; that is the authority known to the constitution, and the people are its source. That authority is in Canada delegated to the governor, as a subordinate officer. It was not only with the consent of that authority, but by its avowedly actively exercised influence, that those great changes were effected during the rule of Lord Sydenham, which have resulted in the present appropriation of the clergy reserves, the exclusion of even the form of religion from the university, the domination of the French Canadians, and the imposition of the system falsely styled responsible government, which the sentiment of loyalty to the sovereign led us so long honestly to oppose. That same authority, by its influence, secret and open, has deprived the conservatives of political power, driven some to resign their commissions, placed the feet of their adversaries (the rebels of 1837) upon their very necks, and, lastly, sanctioned the principle of rewarding treason at the cost of the loyal. Will my friends calmly look at their position, and ask themselves are these things so? Do not these events speak loudly, and tell them as plainly as events can speak, that unless they, as a party, can advance some principle that will at once appeal to the hearts of the masses and carry them with them, their fate is sealed, their cause is hopeless. The right principle I believe to be that involved in elective institutions, that principle which insured to those of the old colonies possessing liberal charters, and the spirit to stand up for the liberty those charters secured, a century of undisturbed quiet previous to the American revolution and a long course of prosperity ever since. Had that principle entered into the appointment of our present legislative council, would the Indemnity Bill ever have reached the Governor? I think not.

The present system places our liberties, rights and privileges at the will of a single democratic body—the Legislative Assembly—without check, without control, save when Downing-Street interposes to protect and foster British interests at the expense of our own. Compared with this, are not elective institutions, associated with those checks common to the free republics of the United States, conservatism itself. The sentiment of loyalty has hitherto led us to overlook the democratic principle as displayed in British institutions, a principle derived from our Anglo-Saxon forefathers, which underlays the very foundation of the constitution itself, and its spirit pervades every part of that massive structure. That principle has been extended by the descendants of those same Anglo-Saxons; and upon it, controlled by salutary checks, they have founded a government of a confederacy of states, the rapidity of whose growth in wealth, population and power, is unsurpassed in the annals of the world, and which points as a beacon to those who will be instructed by the history of the past. I tell my friends, that as a conservative, my heart was with their heart, my feelings with their feelings, my sympathies with their sympathies; but as I gaze upon the onward course of events, I feel convinced that the sentiment of loyalty, however sacredly cherished, must gradually yield before the irresistible spirit of civil freedom; and I have been compelled to ask myself the question, Am I justified, for the mere gratification of a feeling—a feeling that must daily be growing less—in retarding a change that cannot fail to advance the interests of my children and my country? I feel persuaded that Canada never can prosper till her industrial pursuits are efficiently protected; I feel assured that protection never will be accorded while British interests control her commerce. To attain that one end, “protection,” I am prepared to yield many of my preconceived opinions, and to sacrifice my feelings, my inclinations, and my prejudices, if you will.

Feeling an earnest conviction of the truth of these statements, and of the duty arising therefrom, what upright course was open to me but the one you deprecate? The man who wilfully persists in error while he knows it to be error, may dread the finger of scorn; but he who acts up to his honest convictions, even though those convictions do involve a change of opinion, may defy the world, so long as his conscience tells him that change has been induced by no selfish or mercenary motive. I am not one of those who would willingly forsake old friends, in search of new ones. To me, my long connection with the conservative party has been a source of pride; I desire not to forsake them, but would fain carry them with me in that path, which my judgment tells me can alone restore to them that influence they formerly enjoyed in the councils of their country, and to which their wealth, their education, their intelligence and their romantic loyalty, so justly entitle them.

Who among us cannot bear testimony to the superior energy of our opponents in all political contests? Who among us has not, election after election, deplored the apathy of their fellow conservatives? Is it not a fact that nothing short of the Indemnity Act, nothing short of the burning of the parliament houses, would have aroused them from their deadly torpor? How then can you ever expect to succeed without infusing new and life-giving principles into such an apathetic body? I speak the words of soberness, and tell my friends plainly that they are like children playing upon the edge of a precipice, whose foundation the ocean waves are rapidly undermining; they neither know nor believe the extent and the power of the annexation movement; it is guided by men of reflection and intellect; it is supported by individual contributions, with a liberality to which you will hardly yield your credence; it is carrying with it two-thirds of the inhabitants of the cities of Lower Canada, with nearly all the rural constituencies, and will soon speak in a voice not to be misunderstood. It is folly to believe in the opposition to that measure of those in Canada West, whose whole lives contradict the assertion now upon their lips; another shifting of the scene on the political stage, and those men go with Lower Canada, the ground glides from under our feet, and the stars and stripes tell the tale. Listen then to him who dislikes annexation, both from feeling and conviction, as heartily as yourselves. Go with the advocates of elective institutions, and thereby cut the very ground from under the feet of this party, and you may yet aid in preserving a territory of greater area than the whole United States, as a field for British industry and British enterprise; you may yet level with the ground the annexation movement, and erect a fair temple to social order and civil freedom upon its ruins. Neglect this advice, disregard this warning, and the precipice upon which you are standing will tumble into the ocean, burying beneath the waves everything British in name, heart, and sentiment. I speak earnestly upon these matters, for I feel deeply; the only chance of preserving British connection is by the abrogation of that power which, in the collision caused by the conflicting interests of the two countries, sacrifices those of the weaker. To continue British, Canada must possess a prosperity as great and as rapid in its growth as that of its neighbour, and with institutions not less favourable to popular liberty. If my views are erroneous, refute them; if you have a more promising policy, propose it; but do not, I pray you, by increasing our divisions and by giving them publicity, advocate the party of your friends at the feet of its opponents.

J. W. GAMBLE.

PINE GROVE MILLS, VAUGHAN,

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